

FINANCE, REVENUE & BONDING COMMITTEE – February 23, 2009

Public Testimony by Gary Cohen – Triple Threat TV

Senator Daily, Representative Staples, and members of the Finance Committee, my name is Gary Cohen from Triple Threat Television. I am here to testify on Senate Bill 933.

I've owned my television production company for the past 26 years - 25 of them in New York City. Last year, because of the Film and Digital Media Tax Credit, I moved my company up to Connecticut.

I work in documentaries, sometimes talk or news shows, sometimes reality series. This is a multi-billion dollar a year industry. Just as Hollywood is the capital of the movie world, New York is the capital of the documentary world. It's where the buyers are, it's where the stories are and it's where the creative community lives.

Up until now, these people have come to New York from all over the place. They learn a craft - writing, producing or editing. They work their way up in their twenties and by the time they're in their thirties, they have become the core of the industry. They have also often gotten married, maybe had kids and started to consider where to raise them. We could stay in Manhattan, but what are the relative advantages to Brooklyn, New Jersey or Westchester? The most talented and ambitious of these people are magnets, attracting little creative communities around themselves. By the time they are in their forties, they will be the driving force in the television world.

Now, because of the enlightened legislation that was enacted by this very legislature in 2006, there is a tremendous opportunity to grow this business right here in Connecticut. The Connecticut Film Tax Credit changes the balance of where to live and where to house your production company. Connecticut now makes sense in a whole new way. We're not talking about a quantum shift here. We have such an advantage because of our close in proximity to the heart of the cable TV world. This legislation can be the stimulus that makes Connecticut the hub of its own documentary community.

By moving my office here, I've taken my own little creative community here with me. My lead producer, Matt McDonald is 27 and until this year, he had lived his whole life in New Jersey. My production manager, Niki Usbay, is only 23 and she was living in Astoria. When my company moved, they both moved here, together I might add. In not so very long, they'll be those people I talked about - forces in the industry. If this legislation stays in place, chances are that they will, too. If not, it's a safe bet that they will follow the work and settle elsewhere. That would be a shame for them and a shame for Connecticut, too.